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## The Doctrine of Active Resistance in the Sixteenth Century

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Resistance to established authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical, and the struggle between church and state marks every path from Pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand) and his encounter with the German Emperor to John Knox's famous interview with Mary, Queen of Scots. Over the five centuries from Becket's quarrel to Knox's protest one can see that resistance to monarchy is an integral part of European history. As one enters the fourteenth century one sees a Dante Alighieri in Florence and Marsilius from Padua circumscribing political authority.

Sixteenth century theologians faced political decisions as both Protestant and Catholic explored the limits of obedience to secular and religious authorities. St. Paul's admonition to the Roman congregation stated in the famous thirteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans that every soul should be obedient to the existing powers 'for conscience sake'. This article will explore the late medieval sources and the sixteenth century context of Continental Reformation theologians' response to that agony of conscience. In the mid-1980s, historians such as Quentin Skinner of Cambridge revised the assumption that Luther's theology somehow prevented resistance to the state.<sup>1)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1978), 2 vols.